

4.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

Section 4.1 assesses the impacts that may result from the proposed Project on the existing vistas and visual resources within the area. The purpose of this analysis is to determine if a change in the visual environment will occur, whether that change will be viewed as a positive or negative one, and the degree of any change relative to the existing setting. Mitigation measures are recommended to avoid or minimize significant visual impacts.

In this section the existing visual setting is analyzed and baseline scenic character is established. Project components are reviewed, including all proposed visible features, construction techniques, and Project scheduling. The proposed Project is evaluated with respect to viewer's expected sensitivity and expectations, and reviewed for consistency with applicable planning policies. Levels of impact are determined according to CEQA definitions and guidelines.

4.1.1 Environmental Setting

Onshore

The Sandspit Beach parking lot is located along Pecho Valley Road within Montaña de Oro State Park. Montaña de Oro consists of 8,000 acres of rugged cliffs, sandy beaches, coastal plains, streams, and gently rolling hills including coastal scrub and dune landscapes. Visitors come to Montaña de Oro every year to enjoy hiking trails, public access beaches, horseback riding, camping and to enjoy the scenic view of over 100 miles (161 km) of coastline. A unique feature of Montaña de Oro State Park is the long sandspit that separates Morro Bay from the ocean. The Sandspit Trail is a popular location for surfing, fishing, bird watching, hiking, and other daytime activities. The sandspit can be reached from a trailhead located at the Sandspit Beach parking lot where non-flush restrooms are located.

Pecho Valley Road passes through Montaña de Oro and the community of Los Osos, and then connects with Los Osos Valley Road, which serves as a major corridor for traffic to and from the City of San Luis Obispo. Views of the ridge conduit system site are visible from Los Osos Valley Road. The ridge is covered with a mixture of coastal scrub/oak woodland and annual grasslands. The coastal scrub/oak woodland consists of varying heights of trees and shrubs. The mountains serve as a backdrop for the valley bottom agricultural fields of flowers and vegetables. The cultivated area of the valley bottom is the dominant feature in the foreground views from Los Osos Valley

1 Road. Views from vantage points along Los Osos Valley Road are framed by the Irish
2 Hill Mountain Range as the backdrop. Figure 4.1-1 presents key viewing areas along
3 the Project route. Figures 4.1-2 through 4.1-4 present typical views of the Project site
4 from the key viewing areas.

5 **Offshore**

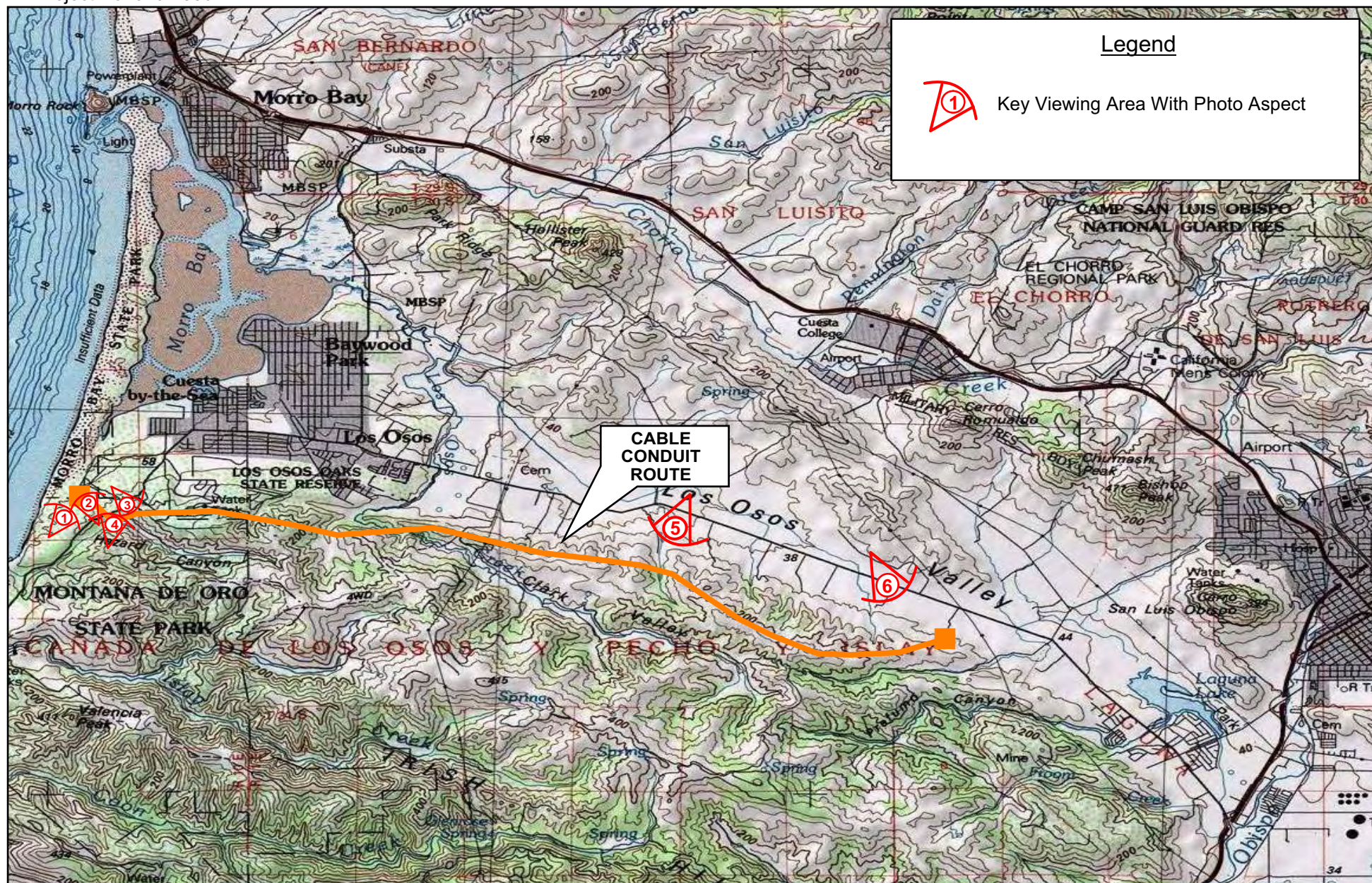
6 Montaña de Oro State Park features over 7.0 miles (11.3 km) of ocean frontage and
7 nearly 4.0 miles (6.4 km) of shoreline along the Morro Bay National Estuary. Views of
8 the marine environment from the shoreline of Montaña de Oro State Park are
9 essentially pristine except for the seagoing traffic, including nighttime traffic. From the
10 sandspit beach, marine mammals, including sea lions, cetaceans, and harbor porpoises
11 are frequently observed. Rocky areas and kelp beds to the south support populations
12 of sea otters. Gray whales can occur from December to May, with the greatest number
13 in January during the southward migration. Aesthetic and visual resources of the
14 offshore region in Montaña de Oro State Park add great value to the area.

15 **4.1.2 Regulatory Setting**

16 The visual setting of the proposed Project is regulated by the California Coastal Act and
17 San Luis Obispo County Local Coastal Program.

18 **California Coastal Act**

19 The California Coastal Act of 1976 was adopted after State voters approved the Coastal
20 Conservation Act (Proposition 20) in 1972. A key factor that led to the passage of this
21 landmark legislation was the visible deterioration of the coastal environment because of
22 development pressures of a growing population.



Source TOPOI

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1. Sandspit Parking Lot.



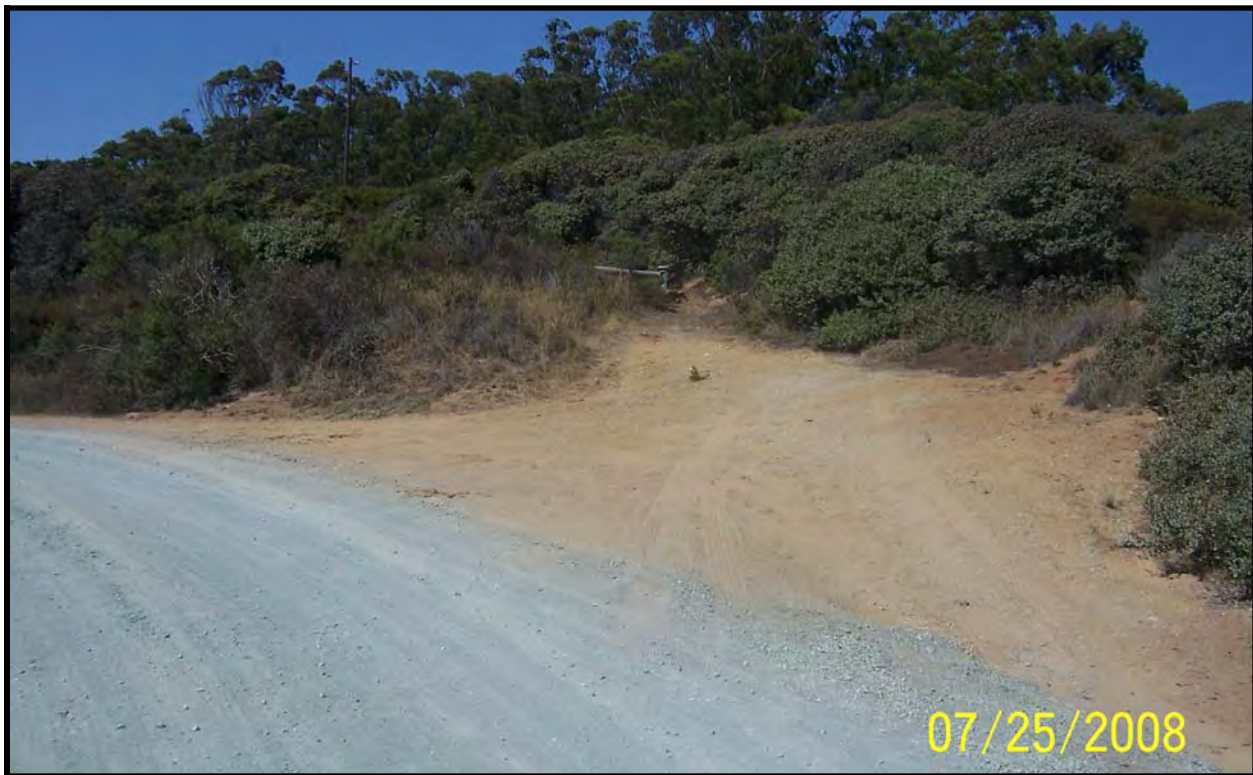
2. Sandspit Road.

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3. Pecho Valley Road Crossing.



4. View From Horse Camp Road.

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Back of Figure 4.1-3



5. View From Los Osos Valley Road at Turri Road Intersection.



6. AT&T Cable Station.

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Section 30251 of the Act is pertinent to visual resources preservation, stating:

“The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas. New development in highly scenic areas such as those designated in the California Coastline Preservation and Recreation Plan prepared by the Department of Parks and Recreation and by local government shall be subordinate to the character of its setting.”

Section 30253 states, in part, that new development shall:

“... where appropriate, protect special communities and neighborhoods which, because of their unique characteristics, are popular visitor destination points for recreational uses.”

San Luis Obispo County Local Coastal Program

As required by the California Coastal Act, San Luis Obispo County developed the San Luis Obispo Land Use Element - Local Coastal Program (LCP)/Coastal Plan Policies. As a result, the County now has authority for issuing coastal development permits for most development in the generally 3,000 ft- (915 m-) wide coastal zone. The Coastal Commission retains permit jurisdiction for projects on the tidelands, submerged lands or public trust lands.

The San Luis Obispo County LCP contains several policies related to visual resources. The policies that would apply to the proposed Project are summarized below:

- **Protection of Visual and Scenic Resources.** Unique and attractive features of the landscape, including but not limited to unusual landforms, scenic vistas and sensitive habitats are to be preserved, protected, and in visually degraded areas, restored where feasible.
- **Site Selection for New Development.** Permitted development should be sited so as to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas. Wherever possible, site selection for new development is to emphasize locations not visible from major public view corridors.

- 1 • **Landform Alterations.** Grading, earthmoving, major vegetation removal and
2 other land alterations within public view corridors are to be minimized. Where
3 feasible, contours of the finished surface are to blend with adjacent natural
4 terrain to achieve a consistent grade and natural appearance.
- 5 • **Development on Beaches and Sand Dunes.** Prohibit new development on
6 open sandy beaches, except facilities required for public health and safety.
7 Require permitted development to minimize visibility and alterations to the natural
8 landform and minimize removal of dune stabilizing vegetation.
- 9 • **Development on Coastal Bluffs.** New development on bluff faces shall be
10 limited to public access stairways and shoreline protection structures. Permitted
11 development shall be sited and designed to be compatible with the natural
12 features of the landform as much as feasible. New development on bluff tops
13 shall be designed and sited to minimize visual intrusion on adjacent sandy
14 beaches.

15 **4.1.3 Significance Criteria**

16 For the purposes of this EIR, an impact to the aesthetics or visual resources is assumed
17 to be significant and require mitigation if the proposed Project results in any of the
18 following conditions:

- 19 • Substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- 20 • Substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock
21 outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway;
- 22 • Substantial alteration of a unique environmental or man-made visual feature; or
- 23 • Light and glare impacts that have the capability of altering the visual resource
24 quality of the Project area or its surroundings.

25 **4.1.4 Impact Analysis and Mitigation**

26 The following describes the potential impacts to aesthetics/visual resources from the
27 proposed Project, and from the alternatives. The potential effects of cumulative projects
28 are also discussed in this section. Where potentially-significant impacts have been
29 identified, mitigation measures that will reduce those impacts have been provided.

1 Impact Discussion

2 The proposed Project has the potential to impact views from public roads such as
3 Pecho Valley Road and Los Osos Valley Road during the construction phase. Views
4 from the Sandspit Beach parking lot will also be temporarily impacted. This analysis
5 evaluates impacts that could create significant changes when seen from the road
6 corridors. Potential onshore impacts include the presence of work trucks, equipment,
7 and workers. Potential offshore impacts include those associated with the presence of
8 cable laying ships, and support vessels. An analysis of the existing visual conditions
9 and the proposed cable alignment reveals the potential for short term adverse visual
10 impacts mainly in the Sandspit Beach parking lot area.

11 *Construction-Related Less Than Significant Impacts*

12 Construction of the offshore portion of the proposed Project could result in impacts to
13 visual resources due to the presence of cable laying ships and other marine support
14 vessels working in the area, extending out to the 6,000-foot (1,830 m) isobath,
15 approximately 45 miles (72.4 km) offshore. Beach views of those vessels is expected to
16 be most obvious inshore of the State's three mile limit. These vessels are expected to
17 be present within the viewscape of this area for up to 15 weeks during installation of the
18 cable. The presence of marine vessels associated with installation of the cable will not
19 be a significant aesthetic impact because: (1) the vessels are transient and will be
20 located within the marine environment on a short-term basis and, (2) the presence of
21 marine vessels along this area of the coastline is not unusual so the typical viewer of
22 the marine component of the project would not likely consider their short-term presence
23 visually obtrusive.

24 Because cable laying operations will occur 24 hours per day resulting in the anchoring
25 of vessels offshore, lighting on these ships will be visible from the shoreline. Vessel
26 lighting will include that required by the US Coast Guard nighttime requirements and will
27 be consistent with established safety requirements. The activity will result in a
28 temporary, relatively local, degradation or alteration of the character of the site or an
29 existing nighttime viewshed; however, the completed project would not introduce any
30 new permanent sources of light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime
31 views in the area. Due to the existing vessel traffic in the area, the effects of the Project
32 vessels, lighted or not, during construction are considered to be adverse, but less than
33 significant. As the cable will be below the water surface and not visible from the
34 shoreline or from passing vessels, no visual effects will occur following construction,

thus, no significant long-term adverse impacts associated with offshore aesthetics are expected.

Due to the presence of vessels during Project abandonment activities, impacts similar to those expected during cable installation activities would be expected. The 20-day abandonment schedule is similar in length to the construction period and would occur in the same area where vessel traffic is relatively common. Therefore, cable removal impacts to aesthetic and visual resources will be comparable to cable installation activities, and less than significant (Class III).

Potentially Significant Impacts

Impact AVR-1: Potential Light and Glare Impacts

Onshore Construction and abandonment activities could adversely affect daytime and nighttime views in the area (Potentially Significant, Class II).

Project installation activities at the Sandspit Beach parking lot will be short-term and involve minimal above-ground features; however, construction activities may deter some from visiting the Sandspit Trail, and may also temporarily affect scenic resources or degrade the existing visual character of the surrounding areas. Aesthetic impacts may occur temporarily at the Sandspit Beach parking lot due to construction activities. These impacts may include the connection trench that will be dug to connect the cable onshore. After construction activities have concluded, the connection trench will be resurfaced. Obstruction of ocean views from Pecho Valley Road will occur during construction activities, but will only be temporary (approximately four weeks). Onshore construction activities will result in potentially significant impacts (Class II) due to light and glare during night-time activities. No long term visual impacts are anticipated to occur as a result of project implementation.

Mitigation Measure for AVR-1: Potential Light and Glare

MM AVR-1. Light and Glare. During construction, all elevated construction lighting shall be positioned downward and/or toward the west and south such that direct views of the light source are not visible from the residence on Costa Azul Drive, or to travelers along Pecho Valley Road within Montaña de Oro State Park. The lowest watt bulbs possible shall be used and conduct periodic monitoring of the visual impacts of the lights shall be conducted. Monitoring shall be

conducted by the environmental monitor and if necessary will result in recommendations to adjust the location, position, etc. of lighting in the Sandspit Beach parking lot throughout the construction period.

Impact AVR-2: Vegetation Trimming and Removal Impacts (from 1990 County of San Luis Obispo Hawaii to San Luis Obispo Conditions of Approval)

Project installation may require trimming or removal of vegetation to access the existing conduit route (Potentially Significant, Class II).

Project installation activities will require trimming or removal of vegetation in various locations along the Project right of way (ROW). Specifically, trimming or removal of central dune scrub habitat may occur from manhole (MH) 109F to Pecho Valley Road and areas of central maritime chaparral may be trimmed or removed along the Rim Trail from MH 96F to MH 90F. The remainder of the ROW, MH 90F to the AT&T Cable Station, consists primarily of central (Lucian) coastal scrub, coastal scrub/oak woodland, and annual grassland habitat. Trimming or removal of that scrub and trimming of coast live oak trees may occur in various locations along the remainder of the ROW. Refer to Impact TERBIO-3 for specific locations of oak tree impacts. Removal of coast live oak trees will not occur as a result of Project installation activities.

Mitigation Measures for AVR-2: Vegetation Trimming and Removal

MM AVR-2a. Trimming of Vegetation. AT&T shall trim all woody vegetation in preference to cutting, and shall cut all woody vegetation in preference to bulldozing.

MM AVR-2b. Disposal of Trimmings. Existing ground cover such as grasses, leaves, brush and tree trimmings shall be cleared and piled only to the extent necessary. Slash and limbs shall be disposed of as directed by the appropriate agency official.

MM TERBIO-3a. Oak Tree Avoidance. To avoid unnecessary pruning impacts to several oak woodland habitat areas along the ROW, the alternative access routes outlined on the following Figures 4.3-11 and 4.3-12 shall be utilized to access manholes 28.5 to 30.5 and 51 during all Project operations. Appropriate use of these alternate access routes would also avoid and/or minimize inadvertent soil

compaction impacts to the critical root zones of oak trees at these locations due to temporary access of Project vehicles and equipment.

MM TERBIO-3b. Certified Arborist. To further protect and ensure the long-term health of oak woodland habitat throughout the terrestrial cable route ROW, a certified arborist shall be retained by AT&T to perform any necessary trimming of oak tree limbs overhanging equipment access routes. This shall be conducted prior to allowing construction equipment to enter the proposed impact area to avoid and/or minimize the potential for inadvertent damage to oak tree limbs (i.e., equipment, vehicles, etc.).

Rationale for Mitigation

The proposed Project has the potential to impact onshore visual resources during its construction phase by introducing new sources of light and glare and by the cutting and removal of vegetation. The measures presented in this section would minimize the Project's adverse effects on aesthetic and visual resources, resulting in less impact to the visual environment. The goal of the mitigation is to minimize, to the greatest extent feasible, visual impacts caused by the fiber optic cable installation.

Table 4.1-1. Summary of Aesthetic and Visual Resource Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impact	Mitigation Measures
AVR-1: Light and glare impacts	AVR-1. During construction, position all elevated onshore construction lighting downward and/or toward the west and south.
AVR-2: Vegetation trimming and removal	AVR-2a. AT&T shall trim all woody vegetation in preference to cutting, and shall cut all woody vegetation in preference to bulldozing.
	AVR-2b. Existing ground cover shall be cleared and piled only to the extent necessary. Slash and limbs shall be disposed of as directed by the appropriate agency official Implement MM-TERBIO-3a and b : Oak tree avoidance and certified arborist.

4.1.5 Impacts of Alternatives

The CEQA Guidelines emphasize that a selection of reasonable alternatives and an adequate assessment of these alternatives be presented to allow for a comparative analysis for consideration by decision-makers. Two alternatives are discussed for this EIR: 1) No Project Alternative, and 2) Cable Re-route/Maximum Burial Alternative.

No Project Alternative

This alternative would not include or require any new construction activities to take place. The Project site would remain an area of high scenic quality and would not be subject to short-term visual impacts caused by construction equipment, or by the cable laying ships at sea. No construction-related impact to visual resources would result from the No Project Alternative.

Maximum Burial Alternative

Due to the longer offshore corridor required by this alternative, a longer period of time would be required for cable laying operations. This would result in an increase in the period that the cable lay vessel and support vessels would be offshore resulting in greater, but still less than significant, temporary impacts to aesthetic and visual resources. The completed cable will be below the sea surface and therefore no significant long-term adverse impacts associated with offshore aesthetics would be expected.

4.1.6 Cumulative Projects Impact Analysis

Those projects which may require construction at the same time or within the same view shed as Montaña de Oro State Park and the ridge conduit system were analyzed for aesthetic and visual cumulative impacts. Potential impacts to aesthetic and visual resources for the proposed Project would be caused by the use of heavy construction equipment interfering with views within Montaña de Oro State Park and along the ridge conduit system. Therefore, due to the nature of the Project as well as project-related impacts, implementation of projects outside of the view shed of Montaña de Oro and the ridge conduit system would not result in any cumulative impacts to aesthetic or visual resources. In addition, none of the projects listed in Section 3.0 have the potential to cumulatively impact views simultaneously with the proposed Project. Similarly, projects which have been completed would not add a significant cumulative effect to visual and aesthetic resources at the project site. No long-term visual impacts would result following project completion therefore no long term cumulative impacts would occur.

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